

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5666

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOCI, SCUL, SF

SUBJ: SOUTH AFRICAN SPORTS: A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

REF: PRETORIA A-105

1. IN WHAT HAS BEEN TERMED A "DRAMATIC REVERSAL" OF POLICY, NATIONAL PARTY ANNOUNCED SEPTEMBER 23 ACCEPTANCE OF MULTIRACIAL SPORT IN SOUTH AFRICA AT ALL LEVELS, FROM INTERNATIONAL TOURING TERMS TO CLUB LEVEL. MOVE IS ONE OF RESULTS OF NATIONAL PARTY PROVINCIAL CONGRESSES WHICH MET OVER LAST FEW WEEKS. ACCORDING PRESS REPORTS, MOVE CAME ABOUT AS RESULT OF PRESSURE FROM PRIME MINISTER VORSTER, WHO SPOKE AT GREAT LENGTH TO BOTH ORANGE FREE STATE AND TRANSVAAL CONGRESSES ON THE SUBJECT.

2. ALTHOUGH GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE RACIAL GROUPS TO MAINTAIN THEIR OWN SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS,
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THERE WILL NO LONGER BE LEGAL REQUIREMENT THEY DO SO.

AS RESULT, EXISTING RACIALLY EXCLUSIVE LEAGUES WILL NOT RPT NOT BE DISBANDED BUT IN SOME SPORTS EVENTS MAY BE SCHEDULED BETWEEN TEAMS FROM DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS. INDIVIDUAL CLUBS, HOWEVER, ARE LIKELY REMAIN SEGREGATED. ON INTERNATIONAL LEVEL, MIXED TEAMS WILL BE ALLOWED TO REPRESENT SOUTH AFRICA OVERSEAS.

3. NEW POLICY WAS ANNOUNCED BY MINISTER OF SPORT PIET KOORNHOF AFTER IT HAD BEEN FORMALLY APPROVED BY NATIONAL PARTY'S SUPREME BODY, THE FEDERAL COUNCIL. MOVE WAS FIRST APPROVED BY THREE PROVINCIAL CONGRESSES (ORANGE FREE STATE, TRANSVAAL AND CAPE PROVINCE), AS WELL AS BY NATIONAL PARTY HEAD COMMITTEES FROM NATAL AND SOUTH WEST AFRICA. MOVE TOWARD NEW POLICY REPORTEDLY MET SERIOUS RESISTANCE ONLY IN TRANSVAAL, WHERE ANDRIES TREURNICHT LED THE VERKRAMPTE OPPOSITION. EFFECTIVE ARM-TWISTING BY MINISTER OF SPORT PIET KOORNHOF, AS WELL AS PRIME MINISTER'S PERSONAL BACKING, ARE CREDITED WITH PUSHING THE CHANGE THROUGH.

4. GENERAL REACTION FROM SOUTH AFRICAN SPORTS SOURCES HAS BEEN ONE OF DELIGHT. A NUMBER OF SPORTS ADMINISTRATIONS, MOST NOTABLY CRICKET AND SWIMMING, HAD ALREADY MADE MOVES TOWARD INTEGRATION AND NOW HAVE GREEN LIGHT TO CONTINUE IN THIS DIRECTION. THERE IS HOPE IN SPORTING CIRCLES THAT NEW POLICY MAY PUT SOUTH AFRICA ON ROAD TOWARD INTERNATIONAL ACCEPTANCE IN SPORTS.

COMMENT: AS A COUNTRY WHICH LOVES SPORTS OF ALL TYPES, SOUTH AFRICA HAS BEEN HIT HARD BY ITS OSTRACISM FROM MUCH OF WORLD OF INTERNATIONAL SPORTS. CONSTERNATION AMONG SOUTH AFRICANS REACHED PEAK DURING THE MONTREAL OLYMPICS WHEN MANY NATIONS WALKED OUT OF GAMES BECAUSE OF PRESENCE OF NEW ZEALAND RUGBY TEAM IN SOUTH AFRICA (REFAIR). RESOLVE TO ATTEMPT TO IMPROVE SOUTH AFRICA'S POSITION WAS EVIDENT IN SOME CIRCLES AT THAT TIME. INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE MUST THEREFORE RECEIVE MUCH CREDIT FOR SAG'S CHANGE OF POLICY.

5. REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER CHANGE OF POLICY IS LIKELY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ACHIEVE GOVERNMENT'S OBJECTIVE OF GAINING RE-ENTRY INTO INTERNATIONAL SPORTS. AS WELCOME AS CHANGE MAY BE, IT REFLECTS ONLY A SLIGHT CHANGE IN BASIC APARTHEID POLICY. BOWDLER

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